

# LIFE AT THE SEM

May 2020

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## PRAYER REQUESTS

- For Zion, Pierce, and Christ, Norfolk, and their continued outreach and ministry.
- For those affected by the coronavirus (COVID-19), including health workers, parents, leaders, business owners and employees, pastors and church workers.
- For Rev. Dr. Lawrence R. Rast Jr., as he contemplates the call to become Concordia Seminary's 11<sup>th</sup> president.

## DOING WHAT WE WERE MEANT TO DO

First off, we pray this newsletter finds you all healthy, safe, and doing well. As we all know, the pandemic has affected everyone in different and various ways – emotionally, physically, spiritually, and financially. In a time like this, it is so important to check in with people and ask the simple question, “How are you doing?”

It is also in a time like this that I reflect on things theological. Of course, that comes with the job – being able to interpret and view the world through the lens of Scripture, so that the Law of God and the saving Gospel can be effectively communicated and applied.

But there are theological topics that I find just fascinating. Like picking up a favorite book and rereading it, there are some aspects of theology that are fun to rediscover. Lately, one of these areas of theology has been vocation. No, not **vacation** – although that would always be nice!

The word ‘**vocation**’ is often associated with ‘calling’ or ‘job.’ In a very broad sense, vocation means doing the things that one was created to do.

I recently read an article that pointed out Martin Luther had a second theological awakening. Apart from his “lightbulb moment” of understanding what Scripture said about justification – that we are indeed saved by grace alone through faith in

Jesus – Martin Luther also had a similar experience with unearthing a biblical understanding of vocation. You see, Luther in his younger years wrestled with what he wanted to do with his life. One of those things that he did was leave his family and become a monk. However, in the vows for becoming a monk, Luther had to abandon his family, friends, and any outside interest, and be solely about the work of God within a monastery. Essentially Luther was cut off from the outside world.

Upon abandoning this way of life in the wake of the Reformation, Luther realized that he was not only a scholar and minister, but also a son, a brother, a child of God. When Luther married his wife, he took on the vocation of husband, and later, father. One of the key passages that inspired Luther was **Colossians 3:8-4:1**, where St. Paul outlines household responsibilities and Christian living.

It is within these God-given relationships and responsibilities that we are called to work and serve. Not for our own selfish gain or pride, but for the benefit of others. In Christ we have been redeemed and restored to do the work God has called us to do, whether being a dependable friend, a loving parent, a faithful spouse, or a committed worker. When we do the work God has called us to do in our various vocations, we bring glory and honor to His name.

## FULFILLING OUR VOCATIONS

As for many of you, our lives have not changed a great deal in the past month. There are still restrictions and social distancing guidelines in place, although many are beginning to lift or disappear altogether in many places, including here in Pierce – praise God!

One big change here in Pierce has been resuming regular worship services at Zion with social distancing guidelines. Currently, we are offering our regular worship times at 8:00 and 10:00 on Sundays, Monday evening at 7:00, and as an option for senior and those with underlying health conditions, a Wednesday morning service at 10:30. So far we are seeing

a good response, with nearly half of our “normal” attendance in worship. It has been a joy to be together in the Lord’s house and to see smiling faces in the pews, too! While this is a step in the right direction, we are still a long way from opening the church for regular Bible study groups, auxiliary meetings, and other events. Lord-willing, we hope to up and running at full speed in the coming months. All of that said, it remains a privilege to be here and serve God’s people in this place!

In addition to this change, Kari’s work has been starting to pick up at the daycare. She recently welcomed a new baby into her daycare room, and her hours have been increasing each week. We thank God for the opportunity that she has to work and serve those little ones!

We have also had several opportunities to go on drives in the surrounding area, checking out parts of Nebraska that I or Kari have never seen before. We enjoyed taking one afternoon off to ride along on a guided tour of northern Nebraska with my supervisor and his wife. It was incredible to see parts of the state that experienced the worst of the flooding a year ago. We also stopped for a visit at the tourist trap in Winnetoon, NE (see below).

Kari and I also continue to stay in touch with our family and friends on a regular basis. While it has been hard in some ways to not be able to travel (yet), we are grateful for the gift of technology that allows us to stay connected -- from phone calls and FaceTime, Zoom game nights and Facebook Live trivia. We are anxious to do a little traveling before our time ends in Pierce to visit family.



Enjoying a stop in Winnetoon, NE (pop. 68)

These are just a few examples of the ways we have been able to fulfill our vocations this past month. What are some ways you have recognized and fulfilled your vocations? In a time like this, it can be easy to focus on the things that you **cannot** do. But as you think about the various callings and vocations that God has placed on your life, we pray that God would lead you to see all the things you **can** do to serve those around you!

Thank you for all your prayers and support. We are grateful for your partnership as we labor together to make Christ known to the world!

God’s blessings,

Ryan and Kari